

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel claims 1, 2 and 4-12 without prejudice and amend claims 13, 14 and 24 so that the claims read as follows:

Claims 1-12 (Cancelled).

13. (Withdrawn and Currently Amended) The absorbent garment of claim ~~12~~ 23 wherein said second position is closer to an end of said absorbent composite than said first position.

14. (Currently Amended) An absorbent garment comprising:

longitudinally spaced first and second body panels each having a bodyside surface and at least two substrates, each of said substrates of said first and second body panels having a terminal waist edge and a terminal crotch edge, said terminal crotch edges of said substrates of said respective first and second body panels being longitudinally spaced and forming a gap therebetween; and

an absorbent composite having a longitudinally extending length, a laterally extending width and longitudinally opposed first and second end regions having first and second terminal edges respectively, said absorbent composite comprising a backsheet, a topsheet and a retention portion disposed between said backsheet and said topsheet, wherein a garment side surface of said backsheet at said first end region of said absorbent composite is directly connected to said bodyside surface of said first body panel along at least one longitudinally extending first location with said first terminal edge longitudinally spaced from said terminal waist edge of said substrates of said first body panel, and wherein a garment side surface of said backsheet at said second end region of said absorbent composite is directly connected to said bodyside surface of said second body panel along at least one longitudinally extending second location with said second terminal edge longitudinally spaced from said terminal waist edge of said substrates of said second body panel, wherein said absorbent composite comprises a pair of laterally opposed side margins extending laterally outboard from each of said at least one first and second locations and terminating in opposite outboard free edges positioned laterally outboard of respective ones of said at least one first and second locations, wherein said side margins extend

from said first and second terminal edges respectively, wherein an entirety of each of said side margins overlapping said first and second body panels and positioned respectively between said free edge thereof and a corresponding one of said at least one first and second locations are unattached to said bodyside surfaces of said respective first and second body panels, and wherein said retention portion does not form any portion of said side margin, and wherein said absorbent composite is the only component spanning said gap between said terminal crotch edges of said first and second body panels.

Claim 15 (Cancelled).

16. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein said side margins are formed from said backsheet.

17. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein said side margins are formed from said topsheet.

18. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 17 wherein each of said side margins comprises a first portion of said topsheet folded over a second portion of said topsheet, wherein said folded first and second portions form a folded edge defining said free edge of said each of said side margins.

19. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 18 wherein said each of said side margins further comprises a portion of said backsheet disposed between said first and second portions of said topsheet.

20. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein said side margins are formed from said topsheet and said backsheet.

21. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein said retention portion has opposite lateral side edges, and wherein said side margins extend laterally outboard from said side edges of said retention portion, respectively.

22. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein said side margins each comprise a longitudinally extending elastic element.

23. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein each of said side margins has a first lateral width at a first position and a second lateral width at a second position, wherein said first and second positions are longitudinally spaced.

24. (Currently Amended) A method of providing protection against bodily exudates with an absorbent garment comprising:

providing said absorbent garment comprising first and second body panels each having a bodyside surface and at least two substrates, each of said substrates of said first and second body panels having a terminal waist edge and a terminal crotch edge, said terminal crotch edges of said substrates of said respective first and second body panels being longitudinally spaced and defining a space gap therebetween and an absorbent composite having a longitudinally extending length defined between first and second terminal edges and a laterally extending width and comprising a backsheet, a topsheet and a retention portion disposed between said backsheet and said topsheet, wherein said absorbent composite bridges said space gap between said terminal crotch edges with said first and second terminal edges of said absorbent composite disposed over at least a portion of said first and second body panels respectively with a garment side surface of said backsheet directly said absorbent composite connected to said bodyside surface of each of said first and second body panels along at least one longitudinally extending first and second location respectively, wherein said first and second terminal edges of said absorbent composite are longitudinally spaced from said terminal waist edges of said substrates of each of said first and second body panels respectively, wherein said absorbent composite comprises laterally opposed side margins extending laterally outboard from at least one of said at least one first and second locations, and each of said side margins terminating in a free edge positioned laterally outboard of respective ones of said at least one first and second locations, wherein said side margins extend respectively from said first and second terminal edges of said absorbent composite and an entirety of each of said side margins overlapping said first and second body panels and positioned respectively between said free edge thereof and a corresponding one of

said at least one first and second locations are unattached to said bodyside surfaces of said respective first and second body panels, and wherein said retention portion does not form any portion of said side margin, and wherein said absorbent composite is the only component spanning said gap between said terminal crotch edges of said first and second body panels; and applying said absorbent garment to a body of a user.

25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24 wherein at least said side margins of said absorbent composite have a bodyside surface and wherein at least a portion of said bodyside surface of said side margins is in contact with the body of the user.

26. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24 wherein said side margins are formed from said backsheet.

27. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24 wherein said side margins are formed from said topsheet.

28. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 27 wherein each of said side margins comprises a first portion of said topsheet folded over a second portion of said topsheet, wherein said folded first and second portions form a folded edge defining said free edge of said side margin.

29. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 28 wherein each of said side margins further comprises a portion of said backsheet disposed between said first and second portions of said topsheet.

30. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24 wherein said side margins are formed from said topsheet and said backsheet.

31. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24 wherein said retention portion has opposite lateral side edges, and wherein said side margins extend laterally outboard from said side edges of said retention portion, respectively.

32. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24 wherein said side margins each comprise a longitudinally extending elastic element.

33. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 1 wherein said absorbent composite comprises an end region overlapping said body panel, and wherein said side margin extends along only a portion of said end region of said absorbent composite overlapping said body panel.

34. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 10 wherein said elastic element extends along only a portion of said length of said absorbent composite.

35. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 34 wherein said elastic element has a length between about 5% and about 100% of said length of said absorbent composite.

36. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 13 wherein said second distance is about zero.

37. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 36 wherein said side margin is tapered from said second distance to said first distance between said second and first positions.

38. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein said first and second end regions overlap said first and second body panels respectively, and wherein said side margins extend along only a portion of said first and second end regions of said absorbent composite overlapping said first and second body panels respectively.

39. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein each of said first and second end regions comprise opposite corners, and wherein at least said opposite corners of said first and second end regions are connected to said first and second body panels respectively.

40. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 22 wherein each of said elastic elements extends along only a portion of said length of said absorbent composite.

41. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 40 wherein each of said elastic elements has a length between about 5% and about 100% of said length of said absorbent composite.

42. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 23 wherein said second lateral width is about zero at said second position.

43. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 24 wherein said absorbent composite comprises an end region overlapping said body panel, and wherein said side margins extend along only a portion of said end region of said absorbent composite overlapping said body panel.

44. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 32 wherein each of said elastic elements extends along only a portion of said length of said absorbent composite.

45. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 44 wherein each of said elastic elements has a length between about 5% and about 100% of said length of said absorbent composite.

46. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 24 wherein said absorbent composite comprises at least a pair of opposite corners connected to said bodyside surface of said body panel.

47. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 1 wherein said side margin forms an oblique angle relative to a plane defined by said body panel at said location.

48. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein said side margins forms an oblique angle relative to a plane defined by each of said respective first and second body panels at said at least one first and second locations.

49. (New) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein said retention portion has an hour-glass shape.